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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BUREAU OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

Research Memorandum
RFB-170.1, November 2, 1961

TO : The Secretary
THROUGH: S/S
FROM : INR - Roger Hillsman

SUBJECT: Private Statements on the Cuban Crisis by Soviet Bloc Officials
October 23 - November 1, 1962

We have continued to maintain a close watch on all remarks relating to the current crisis by Soviet and East European officials around the world. An analysis of more than 100 reports of these remarks received through November 1 sheds interesting light on the process of elaborating the Soviet response to the US quarantine as well as on the mode of execution of Soviet foreign policy — especially Soviet readiness to mislead or keep in ignorance its allies and second-rank officials with respect to vital aspects of Soviet policy.

CONCLUSIONS

Although the Soviet practice of diplomacy is characterized by extreme centralization of decision-making and bureaucratic secrecy, these features seem to have been unusually accentuated during the week following the President's speech of October 22. It seems evident that Soviet diplomats, with the probable exception of those at the UN in New York, had to improvise their own public and private responses to the quarantine for at least the first three days. Guidance which came to some Soviet diplomats from approximately Thursday, October 25, through Saturday, October 27, indicated no specific course of Soviet action. It indicated rather that the Soviets had no preconceived plan of action in such a contingency and were assessing international reactions before formulating their own response. Remarks by bloc officials provided no serious indication of a Soviet retaliatory response in any specific area of the world, and the Soviets evidently took pains to indicate their intention of making no immediate moves in Berlin. In sum, it appears that the Soviets were caught off guard by the US quarantine, that they needed several days to formulate their own response, and that they were planning no serious moves elsewhere for the near future.

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SOVIET OFFICIALS

Early Reactions (Through October 25)

1) Widespread Ignorance of Soviet Policy. A striking characteristic of the reported statements of Soviet officials abroad during the first two or three days of the crisis is the evidence of their general lack of instruction on Soviet policy for the near future as well as ignorance of the presence of Soviet offensive missiles in Cuba. Knowledge of Soviet offensive missiles in Cuba was reportedly even withheld prior to the American disclosures from officials such as Soviet UN Ambassador Zorin and Soviet Ambassador to Mexico Bazarov. Many Soviet officials (including Zorin) had been instructed to deny the presence of Soviet offensive missiles in Cuba. Yuri Bolshakov, Information Counselor of the Soviet Embassy in Washington, stated on October 24 that he had recently been instructed in Moscow by both Khrushchev and Mikoyan to "get the word" to President Kennedy that the Soviets were shipping no offensive weapons to Cuba. According to Bolshakov, Mikoyan specified that Cuba was receiving no weapons capable of reaching the United States. Bolshakov indicated that he himself had accepted this as the true state of affairs.

Several other reports of denials by Soviet officials of the missiles' presence in Cuba were evidently due to these officials' actual ignorance of their presence and/or to specific instructions to deny their presence. Some Soviet officials explained the US quarantine as a Democratic election campaign maneuver or as a provocation to justify a Cuban invasion.

Surprise and confusion were characteristic of the reactions of Soviet officials abroad during the first days of the crisis. The overall lack of coherence of their statements, both public and private, strongly indicated a general lack of guidance from Moscow at least through Thursday, the 25th.

2) Concern for Soviet Prestige and Denial of US Action. Soviet officials in social and public situations during the first few days tended to predict a forceful Soviet response to the quarantine, including assurances that the ships would proceed to Cuba and would not submit to inspection. But these separate and varied responses seemed to stem largely from a concern for public defense of Soviet prestige and personal opinion, or possibly from guidance which had been issued prior to October 24. In private conversation, a few Soviet officials predicted Soviet retaliation in some unspecified form.

Soviet officials in New York were intimating a forceful Soviet response, with the evident aim of deterring the US from action against Cuba and from interception of Soviet ships.

3) Efforts Both To Assess and To Influence Current for the US. Soviet officials abroad began almost immediately to assess the probable international support for the US quarantine, and to attempt to encourage opposition to it. The Liberian Ambassador in Paris was approached by the Soviet Counselor of Embassy there to find out how Liberia would respond if its ships were

stopped. The Soviet Counselor recommended concerted action against the quarantine, especially by nations "with major shipping interests." He reportedly approached a series of African embassies in Paris along the same lines.

Soviet officials in UN circles in New York, Geneva, and Vienna were quite busy lobbying against the quarantine while also attempting to ascertain international reactions. In West Berlin, bloc officials were apparently under instructions to report on the degree of alarm on the part of the West Berliners.

Overtures Toward Settlement and Continued Efforts to Discourage Support for US

A series of Soviet ambassadorial calls on October 25 and 26 (Thursday and Friday) clearly indicated that Moscow had instructed several missions to begin overtures toward a peaceful settlement while continuing to discourage support for the US. There are reports of Soviet ambassadorial calls on foreign ministers in London, Bonn, Ankara, Athens, Bern, and Vienna. A Soviet overture toward peaceful settlement was also recorded on Thursday in Moscow, where Soviet television and radio chief Kharlamov told Ambassador Kohler that the time had come for both sides to put their cards on the table and negotiate a solution. The Soviet Ambassador to Indonesia (probably under guidance) told the Indian Ambassador there on the same day that although the Soviets would sink American ships if their own ships were sunk, the USSR would not resort first to nuclear weapons and that the question of the removal of the rocket bases could be negotiated.

All the diplomatic demarches to discourage support for the US quarantine were thoroughly unsuccessful, and there are indications that the Soviets were surprised at the degree of support for the US.

London, Bonn. Soviet ambassadors asked both these governments to use their influence toward a peaceful settlement. As in all the instances reported of such ambassadorial calls, the foreign ministers were delivered a copy of the Soviet Government statement of October 24. The Soviets avoided linking the Cuban and Berlin problems. A special pitch was made to the British as a maritime nation that the US quarantine was very detrimental to their interests, and that it was a serious threat to the peace.

Ankara. The two main themes used in a call on Turkey's foreign minister were that Turkey, as a small nation, should cut through the UN to support Cuba, another small nation, and that if Turkey had the right to maintain offensive rockets on its territory, then certainly Cuba had the same right. The foreign minister had the general impression the Soviets were trying to soften up the Turks to make concessions on their bases.

Athens. The Soviet Ambassador delivered a long tirade against US imperialism, and adopted a rather threatening tone. He pressed the Greeks to rid themselves of American bases and military personnel and said that Greek support of the US quarantine was quite dangerous for Greece's

own interests. If the US continued to impede the delivery of Soviet missiles, it would mean war. The Soviets would not allow the US to again try to subjugate the Cubans. However, the Soviet Union desired a peaceful settlement above all, and would not "provoke war."

Barr. Warrs. The Soviet ambassadors delivered a copy of the Soviet Government statement of the 24th and reiterated the Soviet desire for a peaceful settlement.

Conclary. At some point during the same week, two Soviet Embassy officials called on the Guinean Foreign Ministry official in charge of UN affairs to solicit support for the Soviet position on Cuba. They were informed that Guinea considered the crisis a result of Soviet provocation.

Reactions After October 28

A few reports of remarks by Soviet officials after Khrushchev's announcement on October 28 that the missile bases would be withdrawn indicate that the Soviet "corridor-lobby" line had become geared toward doing what it could in adverse circumstances to bolster Castro's position. At the same time, the Soviets were reported to be prepared, if necessary, to ignore Castro's conditions for peaceful settlement.

In New York UN circles, Soviet officials were attempting to focus attention on the problem of foreign bases, even to the extent of intimating support for Castro's demand that the US abandon Guantanamo. And they were subtly trying to give Castro a front-rank position in negotiations over procedure for dismantlement. The issue of American bases near the Soviet Union continued to be played up as an important aggravation of East-West tensions.

While for political and propagandistic reasons some Soviet officials were indicating support of Castro's position, a Moscow LPI dispatch of October 29 reported a "high Soviet military source" as stating that Castro would have to accommodate himself to a Soviet-American agreement. According to the same source, once the Cuban crisis was settled, the way would be open for reaching agreement on other issues. This source also reportedly said the Russians had believed a US invasion of Cuba was possible, but had not expected an offensive arms quarantine.

Some Soviet officials began spreading the line that Khrushchev's agreement to dismantle the bases was a Soviet victory inasmuch as he had elicited a US pledge not to invade Cuba.

Dissemination of Cuban and Berlin Issues

Although a few Soviet officials (whether from speculation or an effort to deter US action) foresaw the possibility of a retaliatory Soviet response

in Berlin, there appeared to be a general Soviet effort all through the week to dissociate the Cuban and Berlin issues. Gromyko's impromptu speech on October 23 at East Germany's Humboldt University may well have been delivered specifically toward this end. He made no mention of Cuba in a speech devoted to the need for a German peace treaty. Remarks on Cuba at the same meeting by GDR Foreign Minister Bolz were deleted from GDR wire service reports of the Bolz speech.

Soviet Ambassador Zorin told a UN group of Africans and Asians on October 26 that the Soviets would certainly not fall into the American "trap" of undertaking retaliatory action in Berlin, "for action against Berlin is just what the Americans would wish." It is doubtless not coincidental that toward the end of the week a few other Soviet officials used the same formulation of an "American trap" to characterize the unlikelihood of a Soviet retaliatory move in Berlin.

On October 31, Soviet UN delegation member Igor Usachev commented to a US official in New York that there was no relationship between the Cuban crisis and Berlin and that the latter problem would not be heated up as a result of recent events. Usachev also said that the way was now open for broader discussions.

EAST EUROPEAN OPINIONS

Comments by East European officials throughout the week varied greatly. Analysis of their remarks seems to warrant three generalizations.

- 1) The East Europeans were doubly surprised by the crisis because even their governments, let alone their diplomats abroad, did not talk about the Cuban missile bases.
- 2) Despite some confusing instructions at the beginning based on a denial of the bases' existence, East European officials were from the beginning of the crisis far readier to believe in the actual existence of the bases than were the Soviets. Private speculation on the outcome of the crisis was based on the assumption of truth of the American claims. The ready acceptance of the bases' existence, in contrast to the frequent initial disbelief of several Soviet officials, probably reflects the expectation on the part of East European officials that they would not have been told of the bases anyway.
- 3) East Europeans were less concerned with the problem of defending Soviet prestige and, with a few exceptions, did not assert to Westerners that the Soviets would resist the quarantine with force. (In fact, several Polish officials expressed admiration for US handling of the issue.)
- 4) Although the East Europeans were deeply concerned about the situation, reports indicate that most felt large-scale war was improbable. They were

immediately concerned with finding a way to negotiate a settlement. Their widely varied remarks appeared to result largely from speculation and personal opinion.

A report of reactions by the Polish Ambassador to Denmark is probably typical for the East European officials abroad. The Ambassador received instructions immediately after the President's speech that the crisis was manufactured by the Democrats as election campaign strategy. When the skeptical Ambassador queried Warsaw on this explanation, he received no reply until October 26 (Friday), when he was told to stay in close contact with the Soviet Embassy there for guidance. Meanwhile, he had received his information from the Western press and radio. (The Polish Ambassador stated that his Soviet colleagues in Copenhagen also had received no guidance through Thursday.)

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